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ABSTRACT

A study examined the communication and conflict strategizing of high school youth to determine the differences between biological sex groups and grade level groups. Data were collected from 217 senior high school students (79 males and 138 females; 162 10th-graders and 55 11th- and 12th-graders), all of whom were enrolled in a required course in interpersonal communication. Subjects were asked to rate the items on the Organizational Communication Conflict Instrument (OCCI) and the Unwillingness-To-Communicate (UWC) based upon their communication behaviors in various group exercises in the required communication course. Results indicated that significant difference occurred between biological sex groups in rating the solution-oriented and control dimensions of the OCCI and the reward dimensions of the UWC. Females tended to integrate arguments and offer tradeoffs to reach solutions while males tended to assert their opinions forcefully and prefer to assume control or dominate in arguments. Results also indicated that grade level was not a good discriminating variable. (Three tables of data are included; 17 references and an appendix containing the UWC and OCCI questions are attached.) (KEH)

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A STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE AND PREFERRED CONFLICT STRATEGY: IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING COMMUNICATION AND CONFLICT.

by

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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to check the differences between biological sex groups and grade level groups in rating the dimensions of the Organizational Communication Conflict Instrument (OCCI) and the Unwillingness-To- Communicate scale (UWC), and to determine the relationships among these variable measures. The results indicate that significant difference occurred between biological sex groups in rating the solution-oriented and control dimensions of the OCCI and the reward dimensions of the UWC. Interpretation of the results are discussed in this paper.

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A STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE AND PREFERRED CONFLICT STRATEGY: IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING BOTH COMMUNICATION AND CONFLICT.

BACKGROUND

Communication has been taught in high school and college classrooms for years. Within the past fifteen years, there has been an increasing national interest in understanding and analysis of conflict and instruction in interpersonal and organizational conflict management.(Jandt and Hare, 1976).

Conflict is defined by Hocker and Wilmot (1985) as "an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce rewards, and interference from the other party in achieving their goals." Similarly, Folger and Poole (1984) describe conflict as "the interaction of interdependent people who perceive incompatible goals and interference from each other in achieving goals." These perceptions are based upon communication behavior derived from verbal and non-verbal discourse.

The communication process is at the heart of human conflict. Communication behavior creates conflict, reflects conflict, and is the means-through-which conflict is, or is not resolved. (Hocker and Wilmot, 1985) Folger and Poole remark

that "although communication processes can worsen or improve conflict interaction, and although they do play a critical role in defining issues, they are rarely the sole source of conflicts (1984, p. 5). Nevertheless, conflict and communication are inextricably linked.

Although various communication scholars and teachers have conducted research and developed learning materials in conflict and mediation (for example, Hocker and Wilmot, INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT 2nd ed., 1985; and Folger and Poole. WORKING THROUGH CONFLICT: A COMMUNICATION PERSPECTIVE. 1984), little pedagogical research has been reported which examines the developmental aspects of conflict and communication or evaluates conflict strategies in connection with such important variables as communication apprehension or willingness to communicate.

Canary and Spitzberg (1989) report that the scope of conflict management strategies are positively linked to communication competency, whereas avoidance of conflict is negatively linked to communication competency.

Using their conceptual model that conflict strategies fall into three distinctive orientations - integrative, distributive, and avoidant; the preferred strategy from a

communication perspective is supposed to be integrative (Canary and Spitzberg, 1989).

If effective conflict strategies are learned and expert and novice interactants can be differentiated (see Putnam and Wilson, in press), then it becomes increasingly important for teachers to understand the developmental processes between communication competency and conflict strategy choice for the purpose of teaching students to employ integrative and/or relational approaches to conflict situations.

The bulk of conflict research conducted by communication scholars has focused upon organizations and management (see for example, the special issue of MANAGEMENT COMMUNICATION QUARTERLY dealing with "Communication and Conflict Styles in Organizations", edited by Putnam, 1988). Little research has been reported on the developmental aspects of conflict and communication among adolescents.

Recent surveys of conflict resolution and peace studies ("Peace Studies: Past and Future", THE ANNALS OF THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCE, July, 1989). provide details on course and programs in colleges and universities, but not high schools.

One result of the lack of reported resources and programs on the secondary level is that few high school curricula have any materials relating to communication competency of participants. Instead, the notable high school programs. such as PROBLEM SOLVING CONFLICT RESOLUTION by Einstein (1985) and CONFLICT MANAGEMENT: A CURRICULUM FOR PEACEMAKING by Loescher (1983) are built upon law and justice issues or personal adjustment and counselling goals rather than interpersonal communication outcomes.

THIS STUDY

To meet a need for more systematic inquiry in the communication and conflict strategizing of high school youth, this study was undertaken with high school students enrolled in speech communication courses at a midwestern high school.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

1. Will there be differences between gender groups (males and females) in rating the dimensions of the Organizational Communication Conflict Instrument (OCCI) and in rating the dimensions of the Unwillingness-To-Communicate Scale? (gender differences were chosen as variables because prior research with the Unwillingness-To-Communicate Scale show normative differences between genders on this measure.)

2. Will there be differences between Grade level groups (10th grade and 11th and 12th grade groups) in rating the dimensions of the OCCI and in rating the dimensions of the Unwillingness-to-Communicate Scale? (Grade levels were chosen as rough correlates to the influence of maturity and/or experience of subjects.)

3. What are the relationships among the dimensions of the OCCI, among the dimensions of Unwillingness-to-Communicate, and between OCCI variables and Unwillingness-to-Communicate variables?

PROCEDURES.

Methods

The sample consisted of 217 senior high school students (79 males and 138 females; 162 10th graders and 55 11th and 12th graders). Subjects were divided into these groups because generally 10th graders had not completed an introductory course in communication, while the 11th and 12th graders had completed a course in the subject area. All students were enrolled in a required course in interpersonal communication at a midwestern senior high school.

In this class, students are involved in a variety of dyadic and group exercises. Seven intact interpersonal classes were asked to rate the Organizational Communication Conflict Instrument and the Unwillingness-to-Communicate Scale. Students were asked to rate the items on the two instruments based upon their communication behaviors in various group exercises in the classroom. Some items were modified to make them applicable for these respondents (see Appendix A).

Instruments

-Organizational Communication Conflict Instrument

The OCCI, as developed by Putnam and Wilson(1982), consists of three factors: nonconfrontation, solution-orientation, and control. The nonconfrontation dimension consists of both smoothing and avoidance strategies, while solution-orientation consists of compromise and collaborative strategies. Control refers to the polarized behaviors of the individual in group situations.

Earlier factor analyses indicate that 56 percent of all of the variance is explained by the three factor solution. The internal reliability of the instrument as assessed by Cronbach's alpha is .93 for nonconfrontation, .88 for solution-orientation, and .82 for control.

The OCCI is different from other conflict assessment instruments as it focuses on behavioral choices that respondents make rather than a person's generalized style of dealing with conflict. Participants indicate their level of agreement from one- "strongly agree" to five-"strongly disagree".

-Unwillingness-To-Communicate Scale

In 1976, Burgoon designed the Unwillingness-to-Communicate Instrument (UWC) which focuses on anomie, alienation, introversion, self-esteem, and communication apprehension.

The original instrument consisted of 38 items. A varimax rotation produced a two-factor solution:

1. communication with family and friends (approach-avoidance), and
2. communication with others (rewards).

The two factor solution accounts for 44 percent of the variance. The split-half reliability was 90 percent for the first factor and 79 percent for the second.

In this study, the instrument was slightly altered so that students could rate themselves in terms of their interpersonal communication with other students in the class. The response categories again vary from one-"strongly agree" to five- "strongly disagree".

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS.

Initially, a one way analysis of variance was completed for each dependent measure. A two-way analysis of variance was completed to check for interaction effects between biological sex and grade level for each dependent measure. Pearson- Product-Moment Correlation Coefficients were completed to determine relationships among variables.

RESULTS

The results of the study, reported in Table 1, indicate that significant differences occurred between biological sex groups in rating solution-oriented and control dimensions of the OCCI ($p < .05$) and the reward dimension of the UWC ($p < .0001$).

The grade level results indicate that only marginal differences exist between grade level groups (see Table 2).

The correlational results, reported in Table 3, reveal that no significant relationships exist among OCCI variables, among UWC variables, but there is a significant correlation between the nonconfrontation dimension of the OCCI and the reward dimension of the UWC ($p < .01$).

DISCUSSION.

An interpretation of the results of this study shows that female students are significantly more solution-oriented in conflict settings, while males are more control-oriented. Generally, this finding is corraborated by other studies with the OCCI used in college settings (Wilson and Waltman, 1988).

An interpretation of the raw data reveals that females tend to integrate arguments and offer tradeoffs to reach solutions while males tend to assert their opinions forcefully and prefer to assume control or dominate in

arguments. Future research might attempt to determine if group members self-reported behaviors are similar to their actual behaviors in role-playing problem-solving group situations. Bale's Interaction Process Analysis Categories could be used to chart the interactions between group members.

Several research questions might be explored:

1. Do group members who score one standard deviation above the mean on the control dimension of the OCCI give more opinion and solution statements than group members who score one standard deviation below the mean, or within one standard deviation of the mean?

2. Do group members who score one standard deviation above the mean on the solution dimension of the OCCI give more fact, opinion, and solution statements than members scoring one standard deviation below the mean or within one standard deviation of the mean?

Other results indicate that gender sex groups and grade level groups rated the nonconfrontation items about the same. There is a great deal of within-group variance, however, so neither of the independent variables are good discriminating variables. In contrast, psychological sex might be a better discriminating variable. (see Bem, 1970,1974). For example, social desirability might influence masculine participants to be more confrontational than feminine participants especially among adolescent groups.

The significant correlation between nonconfrontation dimensions of the OCCI and the reward dimension of UWC seems to indicate individuals using smoothing strategies generally

find (or expect to find) communication more rewarding than those who use other conflict strategies.

Certainly there are other factors which are not dealt with in this research which undoubtedly account for selection of personal conflict strategies as well. For example, individual personality factors are most likely to explain why some individuals prefer certain conflict strategies over others. For example, Cuffe and Eyo (1984) report that quality circle facilitators who were high in tolerance for ambiguity used solution-oriented strategies more frequently and control strategies less frequently than facilitators with low tolerance for ambiguity.

In addition, a study focusing upon the interaction of students may indicate that masculine subjects use more task-giving comments than members of the other psychological sex groups, while androgynous subjects might give more task asking amd social emotional comments.

One pedagogical conclusion of this research is that willingness to communicate is situationally linked to the potential satisfaction one might derive from successfully dealing with conflict among others.

In summary, the study revealed, for the most part, that gender and grade level are NOT good discriminating

variables. Future research might focus on whether gender is a good discriminating variable on how high school student rate the OCCI and UWC scales when they interact with the opposite sex, with children, adults, parents and grandparents, and senior citizens. It might be, for example, that a high school student would rate the control dimension of the OCCI very high when interacting with a group of peers, and rate the dimension considerably lower when interacting with his/her parents. Another study might focus on different communication situations. Likewise. the same type of variance might occur based on different situations encountered.

Other research might focus on the correlation between OCCI and Communication Apprehension between the OCCI and communication confidence, between the OCCI and various role inventories. Most importantly, research should attempt to identify the level of conflict adolescents experience in different social and task situations and the conflict strategies they prefer in those situations. In this way, teachers may begin to understand the needs of their students to learn about and practice various communication skills regarding conflict management.

(place Appendix here)

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Table 1
ANOVA Between Biological Sex Groups
ON OCCI AND UWC

Dependent Variables		X	F	P
OCCI Variables				
Nonconfrontation	M	30.03	.001	.96
	F	30.02		
Solution-Oriented	M	26.91	8.84	.005
	F	22.06		
Control	M	17.83	3.24	.05
UWC Variables				
Approach-Avoidance	M	30.43	1.72	.19
	F	28.38		
Reward	M	23.31	16.67	.0001
	F	19.38		

Table 2
ANOVA Between Grade Level Groups
ON OCCI AND UWC

Dependent Variables		X	F	P
OCCI Variables				
Nonconfrontation	10th	29.77	1.113	.29
	11th & 12th	30.21		
Solution-Oriented	10th	25.54	2.343	.10
	11th & 12th	26.51		
Control	10th	21.10	2.323	.10
	11th & 12th	18.13		
UWC Variables				
Approach-Avoidance	10th	30.65	2.335	.10
	11th & 12th	25.97		
Reward	10th	21.89	.831	.36
	11th & 12th	21.35		

Table 3
Correlations Among OCCI Variables,
Among UWC Variables, And Between
OCCI And UWC Variables

DV	NC	SO	C	AA	R
NC		.08	.06	.13	.35
SO			.005	.06	.15
C				.002	.04
AA					.15
R					

* $p > .05$

NC= Nonconfrontation
SO= Solution-Orientation
C= Control
AA= Approach-Avoidance
R= Reward

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. Place the number in the space to the left that best represents your feelings about your communication with peers:

1 = strongly disagree
2 = disagree
3 = uncertain
4 = agree
5 = strongly agree

_____ 1. I'm afraid to speak up in conversations.

_____ 2. I talk less because I'm shy.

_____ 3. I talk a lot because I am not shy.

_____ 4. I like to get involved in group discussions with my classmates.

_____ 5. In conversations, I prefer to listen rather than talk.

_____ 6. I feel nervous when I have to speak to others.

_____ 7. I have no fears about expressing myself in a group.

_____ 8. I am afraid to express myself in a group.

_____ 9. I avoid group discussions.

_____10. During a conversation, I prefer to talk rather than listen.

_____11. I find it difficult to make conversation with strangers

_____12. I am not afraid to speak up in conversations.

_____13. I find it easy to make conversation with strangers.

_____14. I don't feel nervous when I speak to my classmates.

_____15. I don't think my classmates are honest with their communication with me.

_____16. My classmates don't listen to my ideas and suggestions.

_____17. I think my classmates are truthful with me.

_____18. I don't ask for advice from my classmates when I have to make decisions.

_____19. I believe my classmates understand my feelings.

_____20. My classmates don't enjoy discussing my interests and activities with me.

_____21. My classmates listen to my ideas and suggestions.

_____22. My classmates seek my opinions and advice.

_____23. My classmates are friendly only because they want something out of me.

_____24. Talking to my classmates is just a waste of time.

_____25. Classmates just pretend to be listening when I talk.

_____26. If I got into some kind of trouble, I couldn't talk to anyone about it.

Sex _____Male _____Female

Age_____

Grade Level

Sophomore _____

Junior _____

Senior _____

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. Place the number in the space to the left that best represents your feelings about your communication with your peers: 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= uncertain, 4= agree, and 5= strongly agree

_____ 1. I blend my ideas with others to create new alternatives for resolving conflict.

_____ 2. I shy away from topics that are sources of disputes.

_____ 3. I insist that my position be accepted during a conflict.

_____ 4. I suggest solutions that combine a variety of viewpoints.

_____ 5. I steer clear of disagreeable situations.

_____ 6. I avoid a person I suspect of wanting to discuss a disagreement.

_____ 7. I look for middle-of-the-road solutions.

_____ 8. I give in a little on my ideas when the other person also gives in.

_____ 9. I minimize the significance of conflict.

_____10. I integrate arguments into a solution from issues raised in a dispute.

_____11. I stress my point by hitting my fist on the table.

_____12. I will go fifty-fifty to reach a settlement.

_____13. I raise my voice when trying to get another person to accept my position.

_____14. I offer creative solutions in discussions of disagreement.

_____15. I keep quiet about views in order to avoid disagreements.

_____16. I frequently give in a little if the other person will meet me halfway.

_____17. I downplay the importance of a disagreement.

_____18. I reduce disagreements by saying they are insignificant.

_____19. I meet the opposition at the midpoint of our differences.

_____20. I assert my opinion forcefully.

_____21. I dominate arguments until the other person understands my position.

_____22. I suggest we work together to create solutions to disagreements.

_____23. I try to use everyone's ideas to generate solutions to problems.

_____24. I offer tradeoffs to reach solutions to problems.

_____25. I argue for my stance.

_____26. I withdraw when someone confronts me about a controversial issue.

_____27. I sidestep disagreements when they arise.

_____28. I try to smooth over disagreements by making them appear unimportant.

_____29. I stand firm in my views during a conflict.

_____30. I take a tough stand, refusing to retreat.